

Testimony for the Joint Committee on Judiciary

IN SUPPORT of Raised H.B. No. 6355

AN ACT CONCERNING RISK PROTECTION ORDERS OR WARRANTS.

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Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, ranking members Kissel and Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 6355, “An Act Concerning Risk Protection Orders or Warrants.” My name is Christopher Schenck. I am a resident of New Haven, a medical student at the Yale School of Medicine, and a supporter of Connecticut Against Gun Violence. The views stated here are my own. I give this testimony as a concerned citizen and future healthcare provider.

I respectfully urge the committee to support H.B. 6355 because it will work to protect the people of Connecticut from firearm-related injury and death.

In 2019, 190 people in Connecticut died from firearm injury [1]. Over half of these people died by suicide [1]. The existing risk warrant statute in Connecticut provides a crucial mechanism for removing firearms from the possession of individuals who pose a serious risk to themselves or others. It is estimated that one suicide is prevented for every 10-20 risk warrants issued [2]. Additional research has confirmed that risk warrants prevent firearm suicides both in Connecticut and other states that implement similar laws [3, 4]. H.B. 6355 strengthens this life-saving tool by requiring that risk warrant respondents demonstrate that they no longer pose an immediate risk to themselves or others before firearms are returned. In contrast, the current statute only allows risk warrants to continue for up to one year, irrespective of whether the conditions that led to the issuance of the risk warrant have changed. H.B. 6355 also streamlines the process of obtaining a risk warrant by allowing family members and medical professionals to directly petition the court in addition to law enforcement officers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made urgent action to prevent suicides even more important. Increased social isolation, uncertainty, and financial crisis create dangerous conditions that increase the risk of suicide for many [5]. Even as the incidence of COVID-19 falls and vaccines are widely distributed, many of these risk factors for suicide will persist in the upcoming months and years. H.B. 6355 offers a critical opportunity to protect people at risk for suicide.

While writing this testimony, I thought often of a young man I met in the hospital who had survived a suicide attempt with a gun. During his stay we spoke often about his school, his hobbies, his aspirations for the future. I remember the relief and gratitude in his mother’s voice that he was, in fact, here, with us. I am reminded of how fragile this reality is, how an inch to the left or right in a bullet’s trajectory separates this reality from an alternate where another life is

ended all too soon, where another family is left grieving. A person's life should not depend on an inch. Risk warrants offer us a tool so that when a person is in crisis, a gun does not end up in their hand in the first place. When considering this bill, I ask that you think of this young man and his family, and all those impacted by firearm injury. I respectfully ask the members of this Committee to support this bill to protect the health and wellbeing of everyone living in the State of Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Christopher Schenck

New Haven, CT

Yale School of Medicine, Class of 2023

References:

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